

FIVE LITTLE PEPPERS; AND HOW THEY GREW.

BY MARGARET SIDNEY.

CHAPTER XXI.

GETTING READY FOR MAMSIE AND THE BOYS.

"AND I'll tell you, Marian, what I am goin' to do."

Mr. King's voice was pitched on a higher key than usual; and extreme determination was expressed in every line of his face. He had met Mrs. Whitney at the foot of the staircase, dressed for paying visits. "Oh, are you going out?" he said, glancing impatiently at her attire. "And I'd just started to speak to you on a matter of great importance! Of the greatest importance *indeed!*" he repeated irritably, as he stood with one gloved hand resting on the balustrade.

"Oh, it's no matter, father," she replied pleasantly; "if it's really important, I can postpone going for another day, and —"

"*Really important!*" repeated the old gentleman irascibly. "Haven't I just told you it's of the *greatest importance*? There's no time to be lost; and with my state of health too, it's of the utmost consequence that I shouldn't be troubled. It's very bad for me; I should think you would realize *that*, Marian."

"I'll tell Thomas to take the carriage directly back," said Mrs. Whitney stepping to the door. "Or stay, father; I'll just run up and send the children out for a little drive. The horses ought to be used too, you know," she said lightly, preparing to run up to carry out the changed plan.

"Never mind that now," said Mr. King abruptly. "I want you to give me your attention *directly.*" And walking towards the library door, getting a fresh accession of impatience with every step, he beckoned her to follow.

But his progress was somewhat impeded by little Dick — or rather, little Dick and Prince, who were standing at the top of the stairs to see Mrs. Whitney off. When he saw his mother retrace her steps, supposing her yielding to the urgent entreaties that he was sending after her to stay at home, the child suddenly changed his "Good-byes" to vociferous

howls of delight and speedily began to plunge down the stairs to welcome her.

But the staircase was long, and little Dick was in a hurry, and besides, Prince was in the way. The consequence was, nobody knew just how, that a bumping noise struck into the conversation that made the two below in the hall look up quickly to see the child and dog come rolling over the stairs at a rapid rate.

"Mercy!" cried the old gentleman. "Here, Thomas, *Thomas!*" But as that individual was waiting patiently outside the door on the carriage box, there was small hope of his being in time to catch the boy, who was already in his mother's arms, not quite clear by the suddenness of the whole thing as to how he came there.

"Oh! oh! Dicky's hurt!" cried somebody up above — followed by every one within hearing distance, and all came rushing to the spot to ask a thousand questions all in the same minute.

There sat Mrs. Whitney in one of the big covered chairs, with little Dick in her lap, and Prince walking gravely around and around him with the greatest expression of concern on his noble face. Mr. King was storming up and down, and calling on every body to bring a "bowl of water, and some brown paper; and *be quick!*" interpolated with showers of blame on Prince for sitting on the stairs, and tripping people up! while Dick meanwhile was laughing and chatting, and enjoying the distinction of making so many people run, and of otherwise being the object of so much attention!

"I don't think he *was* sitting on the stairs, father," said Jasper, who, when he saw that Dicky was really unhurt, began to vindicate his dog. "He *never* does that; do you Sir?" he said patting the head that was lifted up to him, as if to be defended.

"And I expect we shall all be killed some day, Jasper," said Mr. King, warming with his subject; and forgetting all about the brown paper and water which he had ordered, and which was now waiting for him at his elbow, "just by that creature."

"He's the noblest" — began Jasper, throwing his

arms around his neck; an example which was immediately followed by the Whitney boys, and the two little Peppers. When Dick saw this, he began to struggle to get down to add himself to the number.

"Where's the brown paper?" began Mr. King, seeing this and whirling around suddenly. "Hasn't any body brought it yet?"

"Here 'tis sir," said Jane, handing him a generous supply.

"Oh, I don't want to," cried little Dick in dismay, seeing his grandfather advance with an enormous piece of paper, which previously wet in the bowl of water, was now unpleasantly clammy and wet — "oh, no, I don't want to be all stuck up with old horrid wet paper!"

"Hush, dear!" said his mamma, soothingly. "Grandpapa wants to put it on — there" — as Mr. King dropped it scientifically on his head, and then proceeded to paste another one over his left eye.

"And I hope they'll all drop off," cried Dick, savagely, shaking his head to facilitate matters. "Yes, I do, every single one of 'em!" he added, with an ex-



EVERY SINGLE ONE OF THEM!

pression that seen under the brown bits was anything but benign.

"Was Prince on the stairs, Dick?" asked Jasper, coming up and peering under his several adornments. "Tell us how you fell!"

"No," said little Dick, crossly, and giving his head another shake. "He was up in the hall — oh, dear, I want to get down," and he began to stretch his legs and to struggle with so much energy, that two or three

pieces fell off, and landed on the floor to his intense delight.

"And how did you fall then?" said Jasper, perseveringly. "Can't you remember, Dicky, boy?"

"I pushed Princey," said Dick, feeling, with freedom from some of his encumbrances, more disposed for conversation, "and made him go ahead — and then I fell on top of him — that's all."

"I guess Prince has *saved* him, father," cried Jasper, turning around with eyes full of pride and love on the dog, who was trying as hard as he could to tell all the children how much he enjoyed their caresses.

And so it all came about that the consultation so summarily interrupted was never held. For, as Mrs. Whitney was about retiring that evening, Mr. King rapped at her door, on his way to bed.

"Oh," he said popping in his head, in response to her invitation to come in, "it's nothing — only I thought I'd just tell you a word or two about what I've decided to do."

"Do you mean what you wanted to see me about this afternoon?" asked Mrs. Whitney, who hadn't thought of it since. "Do come in, father."

"It's no consequence," said the old gentleman; "no consequence at all," he repeated, waving his hand emphatically, "because I've made up my mind and arranged all my plans — it's only about the Peppers —"

"The Peppers?" repeated Mrs. Whitney.

"Yes. Well, the fact of it is, I'm going to have them here for a visit — the whole of them, you understand; that's all there is to it. And I shall go down to see about all the arrangements — Jasper and I — day after to-morrow," said the old gentleman, as if he owned the whole Pepper family inclusive, and was the only responsible person to be consulted about their movements.

"Will they come?" asked Mrs. Whitney, doubtfully.

"Come? of course," said Mr. King, sharply, "there isn't any other way; or else Mrs. Pepper will be sending for her children — and of course you know, Marian, we couldn't allow *that* — well, that's all; so good night," and the door closed on his retreating footsteps.

And so Polly and Phronsie soon knew that mamsie and the boys were to be invited! And then the grand house, big as it was, didn't seem large enough to contain them.

"I declare," said Jasper, next day, when they had been laughing and planning till they were all as merry as grigs, "if this old dungeon don't begin to seem a little like 'the little brown house,' Polly."

"'Twon't," answered Polly, hopping around on one toe, followed by Phronsie, "till mamsie and the boys get here, Jasper King!"

"Well, they'll be here soon," said Jappy, pleased at Polly's exultation over it, "for we're going to-morrow to do the inviting."

"And Polly's to write a note to slip into Marian's," said Mr. King, putting his head in at the door. "And if you want your mother to come, child, why, you'd better mention it as strong as you can."

"I'm going to write," said Phronsie, pulling up after a prolonged skip, all out of breath. "I'm going to write, and beg mamsie dear. *Then* she'll come, I guess."

"I guess she will," said Mr. King, looking at her. "You go on, Phronsie, and write; and that letter shall go straight in my coat pocket alone by itself."

"Shall it?" asked Phronsie, coming up to him, "and nobody will take it out till you give it to mamsie?"

"No, nobody shall touch it," said the old gentleman, stooping to kiss the upturned face, "till I put it into her own hand."

"Then," said Phronsie, in the greatest satisfaction, "I'm going to write this very one minute!" and she marched away to carry her resolve into immediate execution.

Before they got through they had quite a bundle of invitations and pleadings; for each of the three boys insisted on doing his part, so that when they were finally done up in an enormous envelope and put into Mr. King's hands, he told them with a laugh that there was no use for Jappy and himself to go, as those were strong enough to win almost anybody's consent.

However, the next morning they set off, happy in their hopes, and bearing the countless messages, which the children would come up every now and then to intrust to them, declaring that they had forgotten to put them in the letters.

"You'd had to have had an express wagon to carry the letters if you *had* put 'em all in," at last cried Jasper. "You've given us a bushel of things to remember."

"And oh! don't forget to ask Ben to bring Cherry," cried Polly, the last minute as they were driving off,

although she had put it in her letter at least a dozen times; "and oh, dear! of course the flowers can't come."

"We've got plenty here," said Jasper. "You would not know what to do with 'em, Polly."

"Well, I do wish mamsie would give some to kind Mrs. Henderson, then," said Polly, on the steps, clasping her hands anxiously, while Jasper told Thomas to wait till he heard the rest of the message, "and to



"I'M GOING TO WRITE THIS VERY ONE MINUTE."

grandma—you know Grandma Bascom; she was so good to us," she said impulsively. "And, oh! don't let her forget to carry some to dear, *dear* Dr. Fisher; and don't forget to give him our love, Jappy; *don't* forget that!" and Polly ran down the steps to the carriage door, where she gazed up imploringly to the boy's face.

"I guess I won't," cried Jasper, "when I think how he saved your eyes, Polly! He's the best fellow I know!" he finished in an impulsive burst.

"And don't let mamsie forget to carry some in to good old Mr. and Mrs. Beebe in town—where Phronsie got her shoes, you know; that is, if mamsie can," she added, remembering how very busy her mother would be.

"I'll carry 'em myself," said Jasper; "we're going to stay over till the next day, you know."

"O!" cried Polly, radiant as a rose, "will you, really, Jappy? you're *so* good!"

"Yes, I will," said Jasper, "everything you want done, Polly; anything else?" he asked, quickly, as Mr. King, impatient to be off, showed unmistakable symptoms of hurrying up Thomas.

"Oh, no," said Polly, "only do look at the little

brown house, Jasper, as much as you can," and Polly left the rest unfinished. Jasper seemed to understand, however, for he smiled brightly as he said, looking into the brown eyes, "I'll do it all, Polly ; every single thing." And then they were off.

Mamsie and the boys ! could Polly ever wait till the next afternoon that would bring the decision ?

Long before it was possibly time for the carriage to come back from the depot, Polly, with Phronsie and the three boys, who, improving Jasper's absence, had waited upon her with the grace and persistence of cavaliers of the olden time, were drawn up at the old stone gateway.

"Oh, dear," said Van with an impatient fling ; "they *never* will come !"

"Won't they, Polly ?" asked Phronsie, anxiously, and standing quite still.

"Oh, mercy, yes," said Polly, with a little laugh, "Van only means they'll be a good while, Phronsie. They're *sure* to come some time."

"Oh !" said Phronsie, quite relieved ; and she commenced her capering again in extreme enjoyment.

"I'm going," said little Dick "to run down and meet 'em."

According off he went, and was immediately followed by Percy, who started with the laudable desire of bringing him back ; but finding it so very enjoyable, he stayed himself and frolicked with Dick, till the others, hearing the fun, all took hold of hands and flew off to join them.

"Now," said Polly, when they recovered their breath a little, "let's all turn our backs to the road ; and the minute we hear the carriage we must whirl round ; and the one who sees 'em first can *ask* first 'Is mamsie coming ?'"

"All right," cried the boys.

"Turn round, Dick," said Percy, with a little shove, for Dick was staring with all his might right down the road. And so they all flew around till they looked like five statues set up to grace the sidewalk.

"Suppose a big dog *should* come," suggested Van, pleasantly, "and snap at our backs !"

At this little Dick gave a small howl, and turned around in a fright.

"There isn't any dog coming," said Polly. "What does make you say such awful things, Van ?"

"I hear a noise," said Phronsie ; and so they all whirled around in expectation. But it proved to be only a market wagon coming at a furious pace down

the road, with somebody's belated dinner. So they all had to whirl back again as before. The consequence was that when the carriage *did* come, nobody heard it.

Jasper, looking out, was considerably astonished to see, drawn up in solemn array with their backs to the road, five children, who stood as if completely petrified.

"What in the world !" he began, and called to Thomas to stop, whose energetic "*Whoa !*" reaching the ears of the frozen line, caused it to break ranks, and spring into life at an alarming rate.

"Oh, *is* she coming Jappy ? *Is* she ? *Is* she ?" they all screamed together, swarming up to the carriage door, and over the wheels.

"Yes," said Jasper looking at Polly.

At that, Phronsie made a little cheese and sat right down on the pavement in an ecstasy.

"Get in here, all of you ;" said Jasper merrily ; "help Polly in first. For shame Dick ! don't scramble so."

"Dick always shoves," said Percy, escorting Polly up with quite an air.

"I don't either," said Dick ; "you pushed me awful, just a little while ago," he added indignantly.

"Do say awfully," corrected Van, crowding up to get in. "You leave off your lys so," he finished critically.

"I don't know anything about any lees," said little Dick, who, usually so good natured, was now thoroughly out of temper ; "I want to get in and go home," and he showed evident symptoms of breaking into a perfect roar.

"There," said Polly, lifting him up, "there he goes ! now — one, two, three !" and little Dick was spun in so merrily that the tears changed into a happy laugh.

"Now then, bundle in, all the rest of you," put in Mr. King, who seemed to be in the best of spirits. "That's it ; go on, Thomas !"

"When are they coming ?" Polly found time to ask in the general jumble.

"In three weeks from to-morrow," said Jasper. "And everything's all right, Polly ! and the whole of 'em, Cherry and all, will be here then !"

"Oh !" said Polly.

"Here we are !" cried Van, jumping out almost before the carriage door was open. "Mamma ; mamma," he shouted to Mrs. Whitney in the doorway, "the Peppers are coming, and the little brown

house too!—everything and everybody!”

“They are!” said Percy, as wild as his brother ; “and everything’s just splendid ! Jappy said so.”

“Everything’s coming,” said little Dick, tumbling up the steps — “and the bird — and — and — ”

“And mamsie !” finished Phronsie, impatient to add her part — while Polly didn’t say anything — only looked.

Three weeks ! “I *can’t* wait !” thought Polly at first, in counting over the many hours before the happy day would come. But on Jasper’s suggesting that they should all do something to get ready for the visitors, and have a general trimming up with vines and flowers beside—the time passed away much more rapidly than was feared.

Polly choose a new and more difficult piece of music to learn to surprise mamsie. Phronsie had aspired to an elaborate pincushion, that was nearly done, made of bits of worsted and canvas, over whose surface she had wandered according to her own sweet will, in a way charming to behold.

“I don’t know what to do,” said Van in despair, “cause I don’t know what she’d like.”

“Can’t you draw her a little picture?” asked Polly. “She’d like that.”

“Does she like pictures?” asked Van with the greatest interest.

“Yes indeed !” said Polly, “I guess you’d think so if you could see her !”

“I know what I shall do,” with a dignified air said Percy, who couldn’t draw, and therefore looked down on all Van’s attempts with the greatest scorn. “And it won’t be any old pictures either,” he added.

“What is it, old fellow?” asked Jasper, “tell on, now, your grand plan.”

“No, I’m not going to tell,” said Percy, with the greatest secrecy, “until the very day.”

“What will *you* do, sir?” asked Jasper, pulling one of Dick’s ears, who stood waiting to speak, as if his mind was made up, and wouldn’t be changed for anyone !

“I shall give Ben one of my kitties—the littlest and the best !” he said, with heroic self-sacrifice.

A perfect shout greeted this announcement.

“Fancy Ben going round with one of those awful little things,” whispered Jappy to Polly, who shook at the very thought.

“Don’t laugh ! oh, it’s dreadful to laugh at him, Jappy,” she said, when she could get voice enough.

“No, I *shan’t* tell,” said Percy, when the fun had subsided ; who, finding that no one teased him to divulge his wonderful plan, kept trying to harrow up their feelings by parading it.

“You *needn’t* then,” screamed Van, who was nearly dying to know. “I don’t believe it’s so very dreadful much, anyway.”

“What’s yours, Jappy?” asked Polly, “I know yours will be just splendid.”

“Oh, no, it isn’t,” said Jasper, smiling brightly, “but as I didn’t know what better I could do, I’m going to get a little stand, and then beg some flowers of Turner to fill it, and — ”

“Why, that’s *mine* !” screamed Percy, in the greatest disappointment. “That’s just what I was going to do !”

“Hoh, hoh !” shouted Van ; “I thought you wouldn’t tell, Mr. Percy ! hoh, hoh !”

“Hoh, hoh !” echoed Dick.

“Hush,” said Jappy. “Why, Percy, I didn’t know as you had thought of that,” he said kindly. “Well, then, you do it, and I’ll take something else. I don’t care as long as Mrs. Pepper gets ’em.”

“I didn’t *exactly* mean that,” began Percy ; “mine was roots and little flowers growing.”

“He means what he gets in the woods,” said Polly, explaining ; “don’t you, Percy?”

“Yes,” said the boy. “And then I was going to put stones and things in among them to make them look pretty.”

“And they will,” cried Jasper. “Go ahead, Percy, they’ll look real pretty, and then Turner will give you some flowers for the stand, I know ; I’ll ask him to-morrow.”

“Will you?” cried Percy, “that’ll be fine !”

“Mine is the best,” said Van, just at this juncture ; but it was said a little anxiously, as he saw how things were prospering with Percy ; “for my flowers in the picture will always be there, and your old roots and things will die.”

“What will yours be, then, Jappy?” asked Polly very soberly. “The stand of flowers would have been just lovely ! and you do fix ’em so nice,” she added sorrowfully.

“Oh, I’ll find something else,” said Jappy, cheerfully, who had quite set his heart on giving the flowers. “Let me see — I might carve her a bracket.”

“Do,” cried Polly, clapping her hands enthusiastically. “And do carve a little bird, like the one you did on your father’s.”

"I will," said Jasper, "just exactly like it. Now, we've got something to do, before we welcome the 'little brown house' people — so let's fly at it, and the time won't seem so long."

And at last the day came when they could all say — "To-morrow they'll be here!"

Well, the vines were all up; and pots of lovely climbing ferns, and all manner of pretty green things had been arranged and re-arranged a dozen times till everything was pronounced perfect; and a big green "Welcome" over the library door, made of laurel leaves, by the patient fingers of all the children, stared down into their admiring eyes as much as to say, "I'll do *my* part!"

"Oh, dear," said Phronsie, when evening came, and the children were, as usual, assembled on the rug before the fire, their tongues running wild with anticipation and excitement, "I don't mean to go to bed at all, Polly; I don't truly."

"Oh, yes, you do," said Polly laughing; "then you'll be all fresh and rested to see mammy when she does come."

"Oh, no," said Phronsie, shaking her head soberly, and speaking in an injured tone. "I ain't one bit tired, Polly; not one bit."

"You needn't go yet, Phronsie," said Polly. "You can sit up half an hour yet, if you want to."

"But I don't want to go to bed at all," said the child anxiously, "for then I may be asleep when mamsie comes, Polly."

"She's afraid she won't wake up," said Percy, laughing. "Oh, there'll be oceans of time before they come, Phronsie."

"What *is* oceans," asked Phronsie, coming up and looking at him, doubtfully.

"He means mamsie won't get here till afternoon," said Polly, catching her up and kissing her; "then I guess you'll be awake, Phronsie, pet."

So Phronsie allowed herself to be persuaded, at the proper time, to be carried off and inducted into her little night-gown. And when Polly went up to bed, she found the little pin-cushion, with its hieroglyphics, that she had insisted on taking to bed with her, still tightly grasped in the little fat hand.

"She'll roll over and muss it," thought Polly; "and then she'll feel bad in the morning. I guess I'd better lay it on the bureau."

So she drew it carefully away, without awaking the little sleeper, and placed it where she knew Phronsie's

eyes would rest on it the first thing in the morning.

It was going on towards the middle of the night when Phronsie, whose exciting dreams of mamsie and the boys wouldn't let her rest quietly, woke up; and in the very first flash she thought of her cushion.

"Why, where —" she said, in the softest little tones, only half awake, "why, Polly, where is it?" and she began to feel all around her pillow to see if it had fallen down there.

But Polly's brown head with its crowd of anticipations and busy plans was away off in dreamland, and she breathed on and on perfectly motionless.

"I guess I better," said Phronsie to herself, now thoroughly awake, and sitting up in bed, "not wake her up. Poor Polly's tired; I can find it myself, I know I can."

So she slipped out of bed, and prowling around on the floor, felt all about for the little cushion.

"'Tisn't here, oh, no, it isn't," she sighed at last, and getting up, she stood still a moment, lost in thought. "Maybe Jane's put it out in the hall," she said, as a bright thought struck her. "I can get it there," and out she pattered over the soft carpet to the table at the end of the long hall, where Jane often placed the children's playthings over night. As she was coming back after her fruitless search, she stopped to peep over the balustrade down the fascinating flight of stairs, now so long and dark. Just then a little faint ray of light shot up from below, and met her eyes.

"Why!" she said in gentle surprise, "they're all down stairs! I guess they're making something for mamsie — I'm going to see."

So, carefully picking her way over the stairs with her little bare feet, and holding on to the balustrade at every step, she went slowly down, guided by the light, which, as she neared the bottom of the flight, she saw came from the library door.

"Oh, ain't it funny!" and she gave a little happy laugh. "They won't know I'm comin'!" and now the soft little feet went pattering over the thick carpet, until she stood just within the door. There she stopped perfectly still.

Two dark figures, big and powerful, were bending over something that Phronsie couldn't see, between the two big windows. A lantern on the floor flung its rays over them as they were busily occupied; and the firelight from the dying coals made the whole

stand out distinctly to the gaze of the motionless little figure.

"Why! what are you doing with my grandpa's things?"

The soft, clear notes fell like a thunderbolt upon the men. With a start they brought themselves up, and stared — only to see a little white-robed figure,

With a smothered cry one of them started forward with arm uplifted; but the other sprang like a cat and intercepted the blow.

"Stop!" was all he said. A noise above the stairs — a rushing sound through the hall! Something will save Phronsie, for the household is aroused! The two men sprang through the window, having no time



"NAUGHTY MEN, TO TOUCH MY DEAR GRANDPA'S THINGS!"

with its astonished eyes uplifted with childlike, earnest gaze, as she waited for her answer.

For an instant they were powerless to move; and stood as if frozen to the spot, till Phronsie, moving one step forward, piped forth:

"Naughty men, to touch my dear grandpa's things!"

to catch the lantern or their tools, as Polly, followed by one and another, rushed in and surrounded the child.

"What!" gasped Polly, and got no further.

"STOP, THIEF!" roared Mr. King, hurrying over the stairs.

The children, frightened at the stange noises, began

to cry and scream, as they came running through the halls to the spot. Jasper rushed for the men-servants.

And there stood Phronsie, surrounded by the pale group.

"'Twas two naughty men," she said, lifting her little face with the grieved, astonished look still in the big brown eyes, "and they were touching my grandpa's things, Polly!"

"I should think they were," said Jasper, running over amongst the few scattered tools and the lantern, to the windows, where, on the floor, was a large table cover hastily caught up by the corners, into which a vast variety of silver, jewelry, and quantities of costly articles were gathered ready for flight. "They've broken open your safe, father!" he cried in excitement, "see!"

"And they put up their hand — one man did," went on Phronsie. "And the other said 'Stop!' — oh, Polly, you hurt me!" she cried, as Polly, unable to bear the strain any longer, held her so tightly she could hardly breathe.

"Go on," said Jasper, "how did they look?"

"All black," said the child, pushing back her wavy

hair and looking at him, "very all black, Japser."

"And their faces, Phronsie?" said Mr. King, getting down on his old knees on the floor beside her. "Bless me! somebody else ask her, I *can't* talk!"

"How did their faces look, Phronsie, dear?" asked Jasper, taking one of the cold hands in his. "Can't you think?"

"Oh!" said Phronsie — and then she gave a funny little laugh, "two big holes, Japser, that's all they had!"

"She means they were masked," whispered Jasper.

"What did you get up for?" Mrs. Whitney asked.

"Dear child, what made you get out of bed?"

"Why, my cushion-pin," said Phronsie looking worried at once. "I couldn't find it, and —"

But just at this, without a bit of warning, Polly tumbled over in a dead faint.

And then it was all confusion again.

And so, on the following afternoon, it turned out that the Peppers, about whose coming there had been so many plans and expectations, just walked in as if they had always lived there. The greater excitement completely swallowed up the less!

(TO BE CONTINUED)

HOW THE LACTIANS DISCOVERED ICE CREAM.

BY JAMES B. MARSHALL.

IT was in Lactia, and the king of the country was such a grand king that he wore his gold crown even at night, though it made the worst kind of a night-cap. The wise men of Lactia said the crown must never come off, and it was these wise men and the prince who formed a conspiracy against the king, ending in the discovery of ice-cream. But the king lived well, growing fat and jolly, until his son, the prince, became unruly. Then the king grew so thin that he had to use a piece of paper doubled up inside of his crown to prevent it from slipping down over his nose.

The wise men said, "We'll make a plan to reform the prince;" but during the next three years they did nothing but talk, talk, talk.

One day the Very Royal Candle-Snuffer brought them this note:

"*Your plan, or your heads!*" KING JOHN."

They sent back word to the king to please make the prince Chief High Director of the Weather.

The change that followed was marvelous. The prince suited everyone. He made it clear and sunny for a picnic party, windy in the right direction for the sailors, just right for the farmers, cold for the fur-dealers, and hot for the bathing-resort men. The people of Lactia went almost wild with joy, and the king laughed and grew fat again.

The wise men claimed all the merit, but they soon regretted doing so. Thousands of Lactians came to thank them in long dry speeches, and brass bands brayed before their houses all day, while nightly processions marched and hurrahd every wink of sleep from their pillows. The wise men prayed the king to